

USSR

Zviad Konstantinovich GAMSAKHURDIYA
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President, Republic of Georgia (since May 1991)

Georgia's first popularly elected President, Zviad Gamsakhurdiya is a staunch proponent of republic independence who has often found himself at odds with Moscow. During the August coup attempt, Gamsakhurdiya urged the people of his republic to remain calm; nevertheless, he neither praised nor condemned the ouster of USSR President Gorbachev. Gamsakhurdiya has since denied his political opponents' accusations that he supported the coup. Accusing the President of being dictatorial, the opposition has organized massive anti-Gamsakhurdiya rallies and is demanding the President's resignation.

Gamsakhurdiya, an ethnic Georgian, was born in 1939. He has been active in Georgia's dissident community since age 17, when he received a five-year suspended sentence for anti-Soviet speeches. He later graduated from Tbilisi State University and worked at the Institute of Georgian Literature. Through the 1960s and 1970s his reputation as an opposition figure grew. Gamsakhurdiya was elected chairman of the Georgian Supreme Soviet in November 1990 after leading his round table coalition to a decisive victory over the Communists in the October 1990 republic parliamentary elections. He resigned from that post in April 1991 after being appointed Interim President.

A philologist, Gamsakhurdiya is a specialist in American poetry and cites Robert Frost as a favorite. He has published several books of poetry and fables. In a recent interview he expressed admiration for former US President Ronald Reagan and cited the late French statesman Charles de Gaulle as the ideal modern politician. Gamsakhurdiya speaks German, French, and English. He has three sons, ages 30, 14, and 12.

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